AL-FAROUQ OMAR IBNUL- KHATTAB
BY
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Before The Grand Event

Our man is `Omar ibnul-Khattab, of a tribe called Bani `Adiy. His father, Al-Khattab ibn Nufail, was not well-off, though he was well-known for his violence and brutal nature. There is no doubt that `Omar inherited the severity and violence of his father, and that had it not been for his adoption of Islam, he might have lived among the people of his tribe, as his father had done before, a man with a ruthless heart and a violence of character that could never have been suppressed

Yet `Omar's life, in his Pre-Islamic days was more or less the same as the lives of the youth about whom we read in the Pre-Islamic poetry. He was fond of drinking, wrestling with his mates in the market places and courting the pretty young ladies. He used to attend the annual poetic contests at `Okaz market, listen to the recitals of their poets and repeat the verses of the Pre-Islamic poets. As all the other idolaters of his time, `Omar had made his own idol of soft dates.

But one day, as he was worshipping his idol, he felt hungry, and found no harm in devouring his god at once, which thing gives a true picture of the silly and trivial mentality of the idol-worshippers in the Pre-Islamic days.

`Omar was one of the very few who were instructed in reading and writing in his childhood. This is why he was frequently chosen by his tribe to represent them whenever there were any disputes between them and other tribes. Whatever those disputes the mere presence of `Omar was a very influential element in eliminating any difficulty and solving any problem.

That was `Omar ibnul-Khattab, the man of extraordinary strenght, height, broad-shoulderedness thickness of hands and feet; the man who forced the people to listen when he spoke, who always hastened away when he walked, and who usually caused much pain when he struck. That was `Omar who never felt scared of anything or anybody throughout his life. It was not strange to see him facing the first Muslims with all the violence and ruthlessness he had. There was a strong enmity between him and Islam; the reason for this was that, among his people, he had been a man full of power prudence zeal and dignity power to defend his people and their beliefs; prudence to be always having watchful care of their interests; zeal to spend his time and effort to keep them in union; and dignity to provide full respect and prestige for himself and his people always and everywhere. With all these honourable qualities, 'Omar had had to face any call that might have caused disunion among his people, dispersing them, nullifying their aspirations condemning their beliefs and satirizing their gods. No wonder, then, that `Omar's violence inflicted the severest persecution and torture upon the first Muslims. We have seen how he had inherited so much of his father's brutal and violent nature. If we bear in mind that the most brutal and merciless enemy of Islam, its Prophet and its first adherents, was `Amr ibn-Hisham, after wards named "Abu-Jahl" by the Prophet and his companions, was `Omar's uncle (his mother's brother), we can easily discern that `Omar's violence was the outcome of what he had inherited from his father, and of the hideous ruthlessness his uncle used to inflict upon the poor and weak Muslims of his time.

And it was not strange that `Omar's brutality and audacity had gone so far as to make him think of killing the Prophet and establishing reunion among his people once more. But such a daring idea had had to be checked a thousand times before it rose up to the region of his conscious mind this had happened to `Omar. It had never occurred to his mind that a grand event would take place very soon; and it would take place as a flash of light at one of the brightest moments the history of humanity has ever recorded.

The Grand Event

The House of Al-Arqam ibn-abil-Arqam, known afterwards as the House of Islam, was the secret place where the Faithful used to meet with their Prophet, Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, away from the reach of the disbelievers of Quraish. In the sixth year of the Mission, two powerful citizens of Makkah, belonging to the big tribe of Quraish, an nounced their adoption of Islam and joined the party of the Faithful in their holy procession towards realizing the Prophet's and their objective of gathering all the people round the worship of the One God, Allah. Those were Hamzah ibn-'Abdul Muttalib, the Prophet's uncle, and `Omar ibnul-Khattab. The story of the conversion of each of these two great men is very interesting. It happened that one day while the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, was sitting contemplating on the rising ground of As safa, `Amr ibn-Hisham, Abu-Jahl, who was coming up then, saw the Prophet in that contemplative mood. And as Abu-Jahl used to do during the last few years after the Mission, he showered the Prophet with the most contemptuous, hideous and insulting words, to which the Prophet gave no answer whatsoever. Soon each of them left the place and went his own way. A slave-girl, who had been passing by, had seen and heard everything. Hamzah ibn- Abdul-Muttalib, who was a very well-known hunter, chanced to be coming back from the chase when the slave-girl met him. She related to Hamzah with indignation what Abu-Jahl had said to Muhammad. Hamzah felt that his pride was offended and he became as furious as he had never been before. So, he went straight away to Al-Ka'bah; and there, before the Holy House, he found Abu-Jahl sitting with a company of Quraishite leaders. At once, Hamzah raised his bow and struck Abu-Jahl forcefully on his face saying: "Have you been insulting my nephew, and I, too, follow his religion? Now return the strike if you dare." The kinsmen of the wounded Abu-Jahl wanted to attack Hamzah, but Abu-Jahl motioned them away saying: "Leave him alone, for indeed I did insult his nephew most disgracefully. Having thus professed Islam in a moment of indignation and passion, Hamzah found himself, afterwards, deliberately going to the House of Al-Arqam where Muhammad, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, was meeting with his Com panions. And there, he pledged himself to the Prophet testifying that there was no god but Allah and that Muhammad was His Messenger. He kept steadily adherent to his Faith ever after.

A short time after, `Omar ibnul-Khattab's conversion took place. At that time, he was a mature man of thirty to thirty-five years of age, though Ibn-Sa'ad's account is that he was twenty-six. Physically 'Omah was well-built and strong of muscle. Temperamentally he was well known for his strong passion. He was addicted to drinking, and he loved amusements. In spite of his violence of character, he was never ruthless to his people. But to the Muslims, he was one of their strongest enemies, a merciless aggressor of their peace, security and religion. As a national of Makkah, he felt that his pride had been wounded by the first emigration of the Muslims to Abyssinia where they had sought the Negus's protection from the torment they were undergoing at the hands of the disbelievers among their own compatriots How could it be that his own countrymen went to seek security and peace at a foreign king and country? This caused him much resentment

One day the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, was meeting with his companions at the House of Al-Arqam. `Omar got information of that meeting, and prepared to go there with the intention of killing the Prophet, and thus relieve Quraish

of its burden, restore its destroyed unity, and re-establish reverence for the gods that Muhammad had very severely criticized and abused. On his way to the House of AI-Arqam, `Omar was met by a man from Banu Zohrah. When the latter knew what `Omar was resolved to do, he said to him: "O `Omar, I am afraid you are deceiving yourself. Do you think that Banu Hashim, Muhammad's clan would leave you alive once you have killed their son, Muhammad?" And he advised him to start back, hinting that Fatimah bintul-Khattab (`Omar's sister) and her husband Sa'id ibn Zayd had already been converted. This information aroused `Omar's indignation, and consequently, instead of going to the House of Al-Arqam, he went straight to his sister's house. Without knocking, he entered the house and heard a man reading. This was Khabbab ibnul-Aratt, reciting theth Sura of the Qur'an while Fatimah and her husband Sa'id were listening. `Omar drew near, and overheard the murmur is low by definition murmur of the reading. When Khabbab heard his steps which could never be missed, he ran away and hid himself in a closet at the back of the house. "What is this recital that I have heard just now?" asked `Omar as he entered angrily. Fatimah and her husband denied that there was any recital. But `Omar swore that he had heard it, and added that he knew they had abandoned their faith and believed in the new faith proclaimed by Muhammad. At this point, his brother in-law, Sa'id ibn Zayd, had the courage to say: "O`Omar! Don't you think there may be truth in another faith than yours?" `Omar was now positive of what he had heard, concerning the conversion of his sister and her husband. Consequently, and in a wild passion, he sprang upon Sa'id ibn Zayd and gave him a strong blow. His wife rose at once to stop her brother's aggression and protect her husband. But in the struggle, she too received some blows that caused her to bleed. This violent aggression led Fatimah and her husband to fearlessly say together: "Yes, it is true We have become Muslims; we believe in Allah and in His Prophet. Now do what you will." This fearless spirit on the part of Fatimah and her husband caused `Omar to be softened, particularly after seeing his sister's face covered with blood. He therefore asked to see the paper they had been reading. But Fatimah said he must first be cleansed for "none but the pure may touch it"

`Omar did as his sister had required, and then, taking the paper and reading it, his face changed to an expression of regret and sorrow for what he had done to his sister and her husband. The beauty and majesty of what he had just read shook him to the depth of his heart and soul, and with the paper still in his hand, he exclaimed in a low voice, as though speaking to him self: "How excellent is this discourse, and how gracious! How noble is its call, and how generous is its message!" In short, `Omar's good side got the better of him. It all happened in a flash of the moment, when Allah willed it to be. `Omar was inspired to take his decision on the spot. Khabbab, feeling secure now, came out of his hiding place, and said: "O'Omar I believe that Allah has indeed set you apart for Himself, in answer to His Prophet's plea which I heard yesterday, and in which he prayed Allah to strengthen Islam by the nearer and more beloved to Him: `Amr-ibn-Hisham (Abu-Jahl) or `Omar-ibnul-Khat tab." With a pure soul and a heart full of certainty and determination, `Omar headed straight for the House of Al-Arqam where the Prophet was meeting with his Companions and followers. At the door, there were a few of these, including Hamzah-ibn-'Abdul-Muttalib.

They were scared when they saw Omar pacing towards them with his sword in his hand. But Hamzah, henceforth the lion of Allah, said: "Yes'; that is `Omar coming to us; if he is coming for good and aiming whole-heartedly at adopting our faith, that is what we will wish and hope; if otherwise, by the Will of Allah we will easily get rid

of him." At the door of the house, `Omar asked the Prophet's permission to go in, and the Prophet gave him that permission. With his sword back into its sheath, `Omar stepped in and beaded directly for the Prophet who at once caught hold of `Omar's garb and the sword-belt saying: "How long, O`Omar, will you not refrain from persecuting, until Allah sends some disaster upon you?" And `Omar replied: "I testify that there is no god but Allah and that you are His Prophet!" Filled with delight the Prophet shouted, "Allahu Akbar! Greater is Allah," and all the Companions repeated it after him.

The gain of two such men as Hamzah and `Omar was a real triumph to the cause of the new Faith. Both were reputed for their great physical strength, their extraordinary courage, and their social position: thus securing for themselves a high prestige and an unparalleled calibre among their mates in Makkah. Due to his courage and heroism, Hamzah earned for himself, as mentioned before, the title of "The Lion of Allah." Had he lived longer, he might have had an unpredicted influence on the destiny of Islam; but he was prematurely cut off during the battle on the field of Ohod. As for `Omar, he was then in the pride of early manhood. His vigorous stature and ruddy heath, added to his boldness, keen glance and steady purpose, all made of him a man who was always ready in word and deed at the decisive moment. His anger was easily aroused, and Quraish stood in awe of him, being certain that whatever he wanted to do he did, without fear of anybody or anything.

`Omar's conversion to Islam opened a new era for this religion to start its public, fearless pratice in Makkah. The House of Al-Arqam began to be abandoned; the claims of the new Faith began to prevail over the ties of kinship, and members of the same family were to be seen openly taking sides here or there. The believers no longer concealed their worship within their own dwellings, but with conscious strength and defiant attitudes assembled in companies around Al-Ka'bah, and there, performed their rites of worship openly. The conversion of `Omar caused a further division in Quraish; it reduced their power and caused them to reconsider their tragedy. In fact, it increased the Muslims' power very greatly and most significantly. In short, `Omar's conversion made the Muslim courage rise, and filled Quraish with dread and uneasiness. This matter had been very decisively settled when `Omar asked the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, one day after his conversion: "Aren't we following the Truth, O Prophet, whether we die or live?" And the Prophet answered, "Yes, by Him in Whose hand is my soul O `Omar, you are following the Truth whether you die or live." "So why," said `Omar earnestly "Do we still meet in secret? By Him Who has sent you with the Truth, you shall call in public." The Prophet's silence meant his approval of what `Omar had suggested. Soon the believers went out, led by the Prophet, in two rows, the first being headed by Hamzah, and the second by`Omar. All headed for Al-Ka'bah, and there, performed the circumambulation and said the prayers, with the leaders of Quraish watching them without daring to utter a single word, or make a motion to wards these two rows headed by Hamzah and `Omar. The conversion of `Omar to Islam reduced the power of Quraish significantly in that `Omar brought with him to the new Faith the tribal loyalties with which he had fought Islam earlier. He did not hide himself or conceal his Islam. On the contrary, as we have seen, he proclaimed his new Faith to all the people, and fought them for not joining him. He did not at all approve of the Muslims hiding themselves, or holding prayers in the outskirts of Makkah, far beyond the reach

of Quraish. He continued to struggle against Quraish until he could perform his prayer beside Al-Ka'bah, where his fellow - Muslims, his brethren in Islam, joined him. Since that time, Quraish became certain that no injury inflicted upon Muhammad or his Companions would stop men from embracing the religion of Allah, as long as they could rely upon the tribal protection of `Omar, Hamzah, the Negus of Abyssinia, or others capable of protecting them. May Allah be pleased with you, `Omar, for your conversion to Islam was indeed a conquest- and a very successful one.

After The Grand Event
Years Of Conquest

We have seen that the great event took place in the sixth year of Muhammad's Mission, which means that, after his conversion, `Omar remained with the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, for seven years before the great emigration to Yathrib started. During these seven years, `Omar struggled very heavily, bitterly and terribly against Quraish, in defence of his Faith and his brethren's. He had to undergo various kinds of hardships, and smile in the face of adversities and atrocities practised by the blockheaded enemies among the Quraishites, who had rearranged their front in a final attempt to put an end to this new Religion which had weakened them and destroyed their prestige among all the other tribes of Arabia.

After his conversion, `Omar found himself in a conflict: in his days of idolatory, he used to persecute and torment the new adherents of Islam for their religion; now, he could not forbear to see a Muslim undergo any torment inflicted upon him by a disbeliever; moreover, he made up his mind to put the disbelievers in as much an adversity for their religion as they had put the Muslims in for theirs. And not only that. His real aim, besides, was to put himself in bitter clash with the disbelievers, attacking them and, from them, receiving as much attack as could make him feel equal to his Muslim brethren even in their adversities. Justice in `Omar was, then, beginning to display itself very discernibly: this is the justice that would afterwards be part and parcel of the overall character of the great man: a justice the equal of which the whole world has never known.

Yet the effect of ` Omar's conversion in Makkah was not confined to the public appearance of the Muslims to practise their religion, despite all the dangers they were exposed to at the hands of the disbelievers. That effect extended to comprise other fields of propagation in which `Omar played a very considerable and successful role Now, he was persistent and daring enough to propagate Islam in public, so much so that a large number of people, who had had a longing desire to adopt the new religion but had been afraid to declare that before, now had the courage, under the patronage of `Omar, to declare their conversion in public and join the community of believers, their brethren. And the Muslims, then, found no interdiction in gathering round Al-Ka'bah in rings defying the wrathful and spiteful looks of the leaders of Quraish who used to sit there.

Still in defence of their gods, and almost losing every hope of stopping the spread of the new religion, the leaders of Quraish took a step forward and decided to boycott the Muslims, in an attempt to press upon them, that they might change their minds and hearts and go back to their fathers' religion, or, at least, that they might be compliant in talking about their gods. But in vain. For two years, the Muslims had to undergo the hardships of this inhuman boycott. `Omar had to have his share of it, but nothing could be done to stop it. He, as well as all the Muslims, had to endure. What filled him with anguish was to see the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings he upon him, suffer as much as the whole Muslim community and even more. `Omar knew that the Prophet could have lived as comfortably and luxuriously as any king or emperor and even better, had he desired it. But Muhammad was the Messenger of Allah, and he had been chosen to spread out His message among blockheaded and hard-hearted people who were willing to sacrifice everything they had to stop the spread of that

Message. `Omar knew all that, and yet he used to cry his eyes out whenever he saw the Prophet leading such a hard life, void of all kinds of comfort and luxury enjoyed by all his enemies. `Omar never shed tears in his pre-Islamic days, but after his conversion, he was in the habit of bursting into tears - as almost all true believers did - whenever he heard the words of Allah:

{إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَاناً وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ} الأنفال2

"Truly, the believers are those whose hearts are scared at the mention of Allah, and when His verses are recited to them, they increase in Faith, and on their Lord they do rely." (Al Anfal:8:3)

He would also weep very bitterly whenever he would hear the warning and threatening verses of the Qur'an recited before of by him, be cause he learnt from the Prophet how to live always in awe from Allah.

Again, in his Pre-Islamic days, `Omar's heart softened sometimes at certain circumstances: we have seen how he suppressed his fury and was softened greatly when he saw his sister's face covered with blood on the day of the Great Event. After his conversion, his soft heart was such that he wept, and very bitterly, in most cases. This is why during his caliphate, as we shall see later, he filled everybody with awe, and, at the same time, attracted everybody with his soft, kind and sympathetic heart. This mixture of awe and softness gave him the unique quality of a man who was firm without being violent, and lenient without being weak: another sign of the greatness of our man.

For seven years after his conversion, `Omar remained in Makkah, undertaking the propagation of Islam, protecting the Muslims and stimulating the abominable feelings of the disbelievers by doing all that he wanted to do in the course of propagation in public. All these great deeds were concluded with a wonderful action he took when he decided to emigrate to Madinah. He did not take his decision in secret, nor did he start his departure concealed under the guise of darkness. He rather put on his sword, went to Al-Ka'bah where all the leaders of Quraish were seated as usual, performed the circumambulation seven times, then stopped, looked at his enemies and said:

"Misshapened are the faces: Let anyone who wants his mother to lose him, his son to be orphanized and his wife to be widowed meet me beyond that valley. I am emigrating to Madinah." Nobody, of course dared to move a hand or leg. Very soon after, `Omar departed from Makkah, accompanied by Ayyash-ibn-Abi Rabi'ah, and both took their way to Madinah. The leaf of `Omar's Makkan role in his life was then turned to give way to a new leaf of more and more brilliance in the life of our great man, as well as the life of the whole Muslim community.

Omar's Marked Individuality

Another side of `Omar's marked individuality has to be considered within the overall characteristics of his wonderful personality. He was a man of transparent honesty: honesty in word and deed. Whenever he spoke or counselled, all that he said emanated from his honest transparent heart. And whatever he did was an interpretation of what was there on his honest, transparent mind. No wonder, then, that his profound affection and fondness of the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, were the true signs of gratitude on the part of the disciple towards his master. It was Muhammad's Mission that extricated `Omar from the jeopardies of the dark life and beliefs of his people; and it was that transparent honesty that made him outspoken and daring in his remarks and counsels, even to the Prophet himself; which thing drew him nearer and nearer to his master and guide, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him. And it is for this quality that the Prophet made him his second counsellor after Abu-Bakr.

`Omar's perpetual awe of Allah, his profound affection for the Prophet and his transparent honesty, all caused him to have unique relationships with the Qur'an. He did not recite it as all the other Muslims did, nor did he listen to it recited by others, as everybody else did. The Word of Allah always found its direct way to the transparent mind and heart of `Omar, whose transparent honesty in receiving it, as well as reacting to it, moved all his senses and feelings and put them in the service of the Word of Allah. That is why, in many cases, `Omar was so much in a state of Grace that, when any verse of the Qur'an was recited before him, he unintentionally found his tongue ready to complete the verse recited. It did also happen that in some situations, when `Omar talked about a certain matter, the Word of Allah was revealed to confirm what he said. Moreover, in some other situations, when he indulged in the hope of something, he was fortunate enough to have one or more verses of the Qur'an revealed to fulfil his hope. `Omar's glorification of Al-Ka'bah was such that he hoped the name of Ibrahim, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, be immortalized He knew the wonderful task Ibrahim had been ordered by Allah to do with the help of his son Ismail, i.e. the erection of Al-Ka'bah. So one day, `Omar went to the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, and said to him, "I wish you prayed behind Ibrahim's standing." At once, Gabriel came down with Allah's revelation, fulfilling `Omar's wish:

{وَاتَّخِذُواْ مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى} البقرة 125

"And make an oratory (place of prayer) of Ibrahim's standing." (Al Baqara:2:135)

Since that day, billions and billions of Muslims recite the verse of Allah, and emulate with each other to say their prayers in Ibrahim's standing, all in fulfilment of `Omar's wish.

Another incident. We have seen how, in his Pre-Islamic days, `Omar was addicted to drinking, as almost all the youth of his time. But after his conversion to Islam, he gave up drinking entirely, not because there were orders forbidding the drinking of wine, as

there were no such orders, but because he had been responding to the great wisdom conveyed in Allah's revelation:

{لاَ تَقْرَبُواْ الصَّلاَةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَارَى حَتَّىَ تَعْلَمُواْ مَا تَقُولُونَ} النساء43

"... Do not approach the prayers while you are intoxicated that you may be conscious of what you say "(Al Nisaa:4:43)

Yet `Omar, so filled in heart with Faith and inspiration, was not quite at ease concerning that indefinite prohibition of wine. So one day, he prayed to Allah to show the Muslims an indisputable evidence concerning wine. And there came down the revelation:

{يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالأَنصَابُ وَالأَزْلاَمُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ} المائدة90

"O you who believe! Wine, indeed, and gambling and the idols and the (divination) arrows are filth of Satan's act. So avoid it (all) that you may thrive." (Al Maidah:5:90)

A third incident which shows the inspiring power in `Omar. His sense of honour always made him solicitous and considerate for all that protected the honour of any Muslim woman. What if this concerned the Mothers of the Faithful, the Prophet's wives? `Omar's frequent attendance to the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, made him discern that the Prophet's wives received various men of diverse characters and attitudes With this `Omar was greatly annoyed and dissatisfied. So one day, taking a watchful care of all that touched the Prophet's wives, he said to the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, "O Messenger of Allah! Your wives receive the righteous and the libertine. I wish you ordered them to be veiled." He kept on requesting the Prophet to do that until Zainab bint Jahsh, a wife of the Prophet's, became furious one day and said to `Omar: "O ibnul-Khattab! Would you force us to obey your order when Allah's revelation comes down in our homes?" And very soon Gabriel came down with Allah's revelation:

{وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعاً فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِن وَرَاء حِجَابٍ} الأحزاب53

"And if you request of them (the Prophet's wives) any object, then request of them from behind a screen." (Al Ahzab:33:53)

A fourth incident which shows how `Omar's wishes and aspirations were frequently supported and confirmed by the Qur'an. This is an account related by Ibn-'Abbas, Allah be pleased with him. He says: "The Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, sent a boy from Al-Ansar to summon 'Omar to go to the Prophet. When the boy went to `Omar's house, he found the door half open, and `Omar lying on his back.

The boy pushed the door open, went in and greeted `Omar who, being fast asleep, did not answer. So the boy went out before `Omar woke up. But when he heard that the boy had come to him, and seen naked parts of his body, he said to himself: "I wish Allah forbade our sons, women, and servants to enter upon us at such a time without permission." then he hastened to the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, and found him sitting after Gabriel had come down with Allah's revelation in this verse:

{يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِيَسْتَأْذِنكُمُ الَّذِينَ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَبْلُغُوا الْحُلُمَ مِنكُمْ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ مِن قَبْلِ صَلَاةِ الْفَجْرِ وَحِينَ تَضَعُونَ ثِيَابَكُم مِّنَ الظَّهِيرَةِ وَمِن بَعْدِ صَلَاةِ الْعِشَاءِ} النور 58

"O you who believe! They should certainly take your permission three times those whom you possess as slaves, and those of you who have not attained puberty, before the dawn prayers, and when you take off your clothes in the afternoon and after the night prayers." (Al Noor:24:58)

So `Omar prostrated himself in submission and gratitude to Allah.

A fifth incident. `Abdulla ibn-'Ubaiy ibn-Saloul was the head of the hypocrites in Madinah. `Omar hated and despised all hypocrites, for the simple reason that they were stripped of every human feeling. When ibn-Saloul died, the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, rose up to lead the prayers at his funeral. `Omar was greatly dissatisfied, and very daringly said to the Prophet: "Are you going to pray for him, when Allah has forbidden you to do that"? But the Prophet said: "Allah has given me the choice, to ask or not to ask forgiveness for the hypocrites." Then `Omar said again: "But he is a hypocrite!" Notwithstanding, the Prophet prayed for ibn-Saloul, and `Omar, with all the hope and daring persistence in trying to beg the Prophet not to do that, pulled the Prophet's garb in an attempt to stop the prayer; but in vain. Allah, then, to make the matter indisputably clear and decisive for future similar cases, sent down His revelation:

{وَلَا تُصَلِّ عَلَى أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُم مَّاتَ أَبَداً وَلَا تَقُمْ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ} التوبة 84

"And do not ever pray on the corpse of any of them (the hypocrites) who is deceased, and do not stand on his grave." (Al Tawbah:9:84)

The sixth incident deals with the disbelieving captives of Badr. `Omar gave his counsel that all those captives must be beheaded, irrespective of any blood relationships between them and some Muslims. Abu Bakr and some other companions of the Prophet had had a different opinion. They had given their counsel that those captives should be held to ransom; and the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be

upon him, approved of Abu-Bakr's opinion. That was something naturel, as the Prophet always sided with lenience sympathy and mercy! He took the ransom from the enemy and set them free. The next day, `Omar went to the Prophet and found him sitting with Abu-Bakr. Both were crying. Upon asking why the Prophet and his companion were crying, the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, said: "This is because my companions who have taken the ransom of the disbelievers were about to undergo a heavy torment for that," and added that noble verses had been revealed in approval of what `Omar had seen concerning the captives, and in condemnation of ransom taking. The verses say:

{مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَن يَكُونَ لَهُ أَسْرَى حَتَّى يُثْخِنَ فِي الأَرْضِ تُرِيدُونَ عَرَضَ الدُّنْيَا وَاللّهُ يُرِيدُ الآخِرَةَ وَاللّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ } {لَّوْلاَ كِتَابٌ مِّنَ اللّهِ سَبَقَ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِيمَا أَخَذْتُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ } الأنفال 67-68

"It is not fitting for a Prophet to have prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land. You desire the temporal goods of this world; but Allah desires (for you) the Hereafter, and Allah is Mighty, Wise. Had it not been for a previous ordainment from Allah, a severe torment would have reached you for (the ransom) you have taken." (Al Anfal: 8:67)

What `Omar had inspiredly counselled the Prophet with, was a prediction to some verses that had not been revealed then. It so happened that after Badr, Gabriel came down with the revelation of Allah:

{قُلْ إِن كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَآؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِنُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُم مِّنَ اللّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُواْ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللّهُ لاَ يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ} التوبة 24

"Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates or your kindred; the wealth that you have gained; the commerce in which you fear a decline; and the dwellings in which you delight - are dearer to you than Allah, and his Messenger, and the striving in His cause -; then wait until Allah brings about His decision; and Allah does not guide the sinful people." (Al Tawbah: 9:34)

That was `Omar's marked individuality, and those were his transparent soul and his great power of inspiration. Allah's response to His Messenger's request and prayer to strengthen Islam by either Abu-Jahl or Omar ibnul-Khattab, and His choice of `Omar as the nearer and more beloved to Him are very significant. What we have seen in the personality of `Omar is a very clear evidence of that. His conversion to Islam was

really a successful conquest, not only of his own heart, mind and soul, but also of the hearts, minds and souls of hundreds of the people who, being protected and patronized by him, abandoned their fathers' religions and adopted Islam. And `Omar's conversion to Islam stabbed the dignity of the leaders of Quraish in the heart, and put their active persecution of the poor and weak Muslims to a standstill. And `Omar's emigration to Madinah was a great victory to Islam. It added a great deal to the new power gained by the Muslims through the fusion of Al-Ansar and Al Muhajireen in a wonderful rally under the banner of The new Muslim State that had been established there. And `Omar, the wise counsellor of the Prophet, was a man of opinion, whose very words either completed the verses of the Qur'an, or, as we have seen, were supported and confirmed by it, or wished for some thing that the Qur'an came down to fulfil. No wonder, then, that the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, said: "If there be a Prophet after me, that would be `Omar ibnul-Khattab."

AMIRUL-MU'MINEEN
THE COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL

With the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, `Omar was the second counsellor after Abu-Bakr. His counsels and his opinions were always taken into the best consideration. We have seen how the Qur'an, in several cases, came down to corroborate the counsels and opinions `Omar very honestly and daringly gave. And this is why the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, once said: "Allah has set the truth on `Omar's tongue and in his heart." `Omar had played that role since the very day he testified, at the house of Al-Arqam, that there was no god but Allah and that Muhammad was His Prophet. He kept on playing his role with all the honesty and faithfulness he had, while the Prophet was alive. And when the Prophet passed away, he played the same role with Abu-Bakr, the first caliph of Islam, as his first counsellor. `Omar's severity with Abu-Bakr's lenience formed a wonderful governing body that went on very successfully while Abu-Bakr was alive. This state of affairs did not last longer than two years, after

which Abu-Bakr followed his most beloved companion and master, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him. It was quite natural forAbu-Bakr, Allah be pleased with him, to recommend, in the illness of his last days, the man who would be his successor. The inspired choice was `Omar ibnul-Khattab. With all the wisdom he had learnt from his master, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, Abu-Bakr knew that the new Muslim state would be in need of a man like `Omar ibnul-Khattab with his wonderful architectural mind that would lead the Muslims to the great prosperous future that was awaiting them.

`Omar, then, became the second caliph, or "Amirul Mu'mineen" (The Commander of the Faithful), the new title he was the first to gain. The first thing he did after being nominated as caliph, was an address he delivered to the Muslims, in which he introduced, very honestly and very clearly, his constitution as commander. In his cordial address to the Muslims, `Omar said:

"I had been in the company of the Messenger of Allah, and a servant of his; and he had been, as no body else, of extreme lenience and mercy; and he had been, as Allah says of him:

{ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ } التوبة 128

"to the believers compassionate and merciful." (Al Tawbah:9:138)

And I had been at his disposal, an unsheathed sword, until he sheathed me or let me go. Such had I been with the Messenger of Allah, until he passed away, with me much pleased. Many thanks to Allah for this, and with it I am greatly happy. Then Abu-Bakr came into power to manage the affairs of the Faithful; and he was, as you all know, of much graciousness, generosity and lenience; and I was a servant of his and an assistant, mixing my severity with his lenience, thus being at his disposal an

unsheathed sword, until he sheathed me or let me go. Such had I been with him until he passed away, with me much pleased. Many thanks to Allah for this, and with it I am greatly happy.

And now, brethren, I have been nominated to manage your affairs. So be aware, then, that that severity has been weakened, but it will be used only against those who are oppressive and aggressive to the Muslims. But to those who seek safety, religion and good will, I shall be more lenient than each of them to the others. I will never allow anybody to oppress another, or be aggressive to him; for, then, I will put his cheek to the ground and set my foot on the other cheek until he yields to the truth. And after practising this severity of mine, I will put my cheek to the ground for those who are virtuous and content.

I will not levy any taxes on your products or on any of the booties Allah has bestowed upon you, except what is due; ; and I pledge not to expend it except where it should be expended. It is incumbent upon me to increase your grants and livelihoods and fix up, for you, every means of defence, God willing It is incumbent upon me not to throw you into jeopardies, nor confine you in your front posts; and I pledge that if you stay away on missions, I will be responsible for your families until you return to them.

Therefore, fear Allah, Oh servants of Allah. And help me against yourselves by leaving me in peace; and help me against myself by ordering beneficence and forbidding abomination, and by giving me good advice and counsel in all the affairs of yours Allah has charged me with."

With this constitution derived from `Omar's Faith and his clear understanding of the Qur'an, and based upon the teachings and preachings of his master, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, `Omar began his age which marked a new epoch in the history, not only of the Muslims, but of the whole world at large. After `Omar, the whole world has never seen his equal as a governor, nor has it known the like of him as a man. He was unique in everything, so much so that some of those who had been dazzled by his wonderful qualities, have assumed that he was but a myth invented by some intelligent Muslim writers, and that no human being could be of such a baffling personality. But those who know `Omar's life very well will not be so baffled. They will always remember how `Omar was chosen by Allah to strengthen Islam in response to the Prophet's prayer and request to his Lord to choose the nearer and more beloved to Him for that purpose; and they will always remember his sound counsels to the Prophet, and the several wonderful situations and cases in which the Archangel Gabriel came down with Allah's revelation in support and confirmation of what he said; and they will al ways remember his conversion to Islam, and how it paralysed the inimical activity of Quraish, and stopped their inhuman castigation of the first poor and weak Muslims. They will always remember `Omar's daring power, his transparent honesty, his inspired opinions and counsels, his patronage and protection of the Muslims in Makkah before his emigration to Madinah, his heroic strife in the first battles against disbelief, and, in short, his most integral personality that has always baffled, and will remain to baffle, the whole world, until Allah inherits the earth and all on it. Such a great man with all those wonderful qualities knew where to take his place in the presence of the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him. He

was his servant, disciple, companion and counsellor, and from him he could learn a great deal. And when the Prophet passed away, after nominating Abu-Bakr to lead the Muslim congregration in the prayers during his illness, `Omar, most willingly and submissively, took his place beside Abu-Bakr, the first Caliph, as his servant, companion and counsellor. `Omar believed in the Prophet's declaration that Abu-Bakr's faith was weightier than the faith of the whole "Ummah" (Muslim community), including `Omar. And ,Omar would never forget Abu-Bakr's stand against apostasy and the apostates' riot, after the Prophet had passed away. Such a stand will immortalize Abu-Bakr who, seeing `Omar tending to leniency towards the apostates, held him from the neck and said, with all the power of Faith, "Coercive in your Pre-Islamic days, and strengthless now) `Omar By Allah, if they (the apostates) abstain from paying the slightest thing they used to pay to the Prophet, I will fight them for that as long as the sword remains in my hand." Had it not been for that faithful powerful attitude of Abu-Bakr's, Islam would have come to a tragic end, and become part of an old-world history. And we are told that it was Abu-Bakr alone, from among all the Prophet's companions, who heard Gabriel revealing to Muhammad:

{إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ} القصص 56

"Indeed, you will not guide those whom you love, but Allah guides whoever He wishes." (Al Qasas:28:56)

That was on the occasion of Abu-Talib's death. And it was Abu Bakr who sacrificed all his wealth to Allah and His Messenger, and bought the enslaved weak Muslims, like Bilal-ibn-Rabah, and offered them their freedom, making them his brethren in Islam, the religion of Allah that condemns slavery in all its forms. And it was Abu-Bakr who, alone, gained the title of "The All- Truthful Friend", and who was chosen by the Prophet to accompany him in his emigration to Madinah, and to stay hiding with him in the cave of Thawr. And it was Abu-Bakr about whom the Prophet said:

"Indeed Allah, above His Heavens, hates to see that Abu-Bakr is considered at fault." No other companion of the Prophet's reached that rank of a man who used to say: "If one of my feet is inside Paradise, and the other outside it, I will not be safe from Allah's shrewdness." This was the great man who succeeded the Prophet after he had passed away. And had Abu Bakr lasted longer as the first Caliph of the Muslims, the newly-established Muslim State would have reached a status never to be matched by any other state in the world, old and new. But Allah had ordained that that aspired status would be reached at the hands of `Omar, the Second Caliph and the Commander of the Faithful.

We have seen `Omar addressing the Muslims the very day he was elected Caliph. In this address we have a pledge and a confidence: a pledge from the ruler and Commander upon himself to be responsible for every soul and everything in his state, providing them with every means of security and freedom; and a confidence, from the depth of the heart, of the Muslims in their ruler and Commander. And in between the

pledge and the confidence, internal reforms and external conquests came one after the other in rapid succession

II

`Omar was the ideal Muslim ruler who had all the great ability to hold the balance of justice with a very steady and powerful hand. This justice, the like of which the world has never known so far, was a combination of several sources: a part of it `Omar did in -herit from his ancestors; another part he did derive from the over-all constitution of his personality; a third part he did acquire from the experiences of his life; and the most important part he did gain from the instructions of his religion; and all these component parts of his justice made of him the man who was feared and reverred by all other men, and the ruler in whom all his people found not only their security, but their freedom as well.

Justice, in its simplest and purest sense, is equality among the people in rights and obligations, in the execution of punishments and in giving rewards; no distinction between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, those who are kinsmen to the ruler and those who are otherwise. And `Omar's justice was not an exception. As the Head of the State, he felt himself responsible for every soul and everything existent on the land of Islam. This is why he treated all the Muslims alike; not only that: but he treated all the people under his rule, Muslims or otherwise, alike. And he reached the summit of justice when he dealt with his own sons as he did with any other members of his community indiscriminately. The best evidence in this respect is the story of his own son `Abdur-Rahman. Narrators state that `Abdur-Rahman ibn-Omer got drunk one evening with a friend of his while they were in Egypt. In the morning they felt rueful of what they had done the night before, and decided to go to `Amr ibnul-'As, the Governor of Egypt, and ask him to chasten them by executing the legal punishment upon them. Disliking to punish the Caliph's son publicly, `Amr scourged `Abdur-Rahman in the patio of his house. The news at once reached `Omar in Madinah. He was greatly irritated, and wrote to `Amr ibnul `As reprimandingly, commanding him to send `Abdur-Rahman at once to Madinah, which thing `Amr immediately did, writing to the Caliph regret fully, and confirming that he had punished his son in the same way as he punished everybody else, under the same circumstances, in the patio of his house. But `Omar did not accept that justification, nor did he approve of the legal punishment inflicted upon his son by `Amr. He waited until `Abdur-Rahman reached Madinah, sick and terribly fatigued of the journey. Yet `Omar did not care; he rather handled the Islamic Law, and administered the punishment upon his son in public. And narrators say that some time after the punishment, `Abdur-Raliman's health deteriorated; and when his father saw him in the throes of death, he did nothing more than say to him: "If you meet my master, the Messenger of Allah, Peace and Blessings be upon him, tell him that your father administers the legal punishments, and observes the bounds Allah has placed on man's actions."

With `Amr ibnul-'As again there is another incident in which `Omar's justice is practised in a manner that has surprised and baffled the whole world. `Amr's son was one day racing with an Egyptian youth of his age, when the latter outdistanced the Governor's son in the race. But `Amr's son was displeased, and beat the Egyptian saying to him: "How dare you outdistance the son of the most notable parents?" the Egyptian went to the Caliph in Madinah and presented his grievance at which `Omar

sent for `Amr and his son to come to Madinah at once. When they arrived `Omar said to the Egyptian in public: "Now beat the son of the most notable parents." Then, turning to `Amr ibnul-'As, `Omar gave his everlasting utterance: "How dare you enslave people who have been born free?!" This was always `Omar's policy with all his vicegerents and walis and he insisted on following that policy, and never hesitated to be so firm and stern, giving them no opportunity, under any circumstances, to deviate from the right path, or yield to any kind of corruption.

`Omar's relationships and policy with his vicegerents used to be clearly defined in such addresses to the people as: "Brethren of Islam! Let me confirm to you that I have not sent you vicegerents to flog your bodies or usurp your properties. But I always send them to you to teach you the principles and values of your religion, as well as the tradition of your Prophet. If they do otherwise, let your grievances reach me at once, and, by Him in Whose Hand is my soul, I will certainly retaliate upon them...." Such a declaration on the part of `Omar must needs turn the people into real censors upon their rulers, and create constructive criticism which would always lead them to follow the right path, otherwise complaint after complaint would reach the Caliph who would never be lenient with any of his walis.

III

Besides being the Caliph and Commander of the whole Muslim Community, `Omar was a direct and actual ruler of Madinah, the Capital of the Muslim empire that was to come very soon and emerge as one of the greatest empires the world had ever known. Through his direct rule in Madinah, `Omar set up the ideal government which has been surprising and baffling to the whole world up till the present day. World history and world historians have tired themselves in trying to reach the depths of that wonderful personality that the rulers at all times and in all places have been aspiring to imitate. Omar was a man who undertook to care for both the private and public conditions of all Muslims and Non-Muslims alike, thus giving the example to all rulers throughout history, those who consider themselves greater than the surface transitory problems of their people.

How about a ruler, like `Omar, who used to walk `about at night to explore the conditions of his people, and get information about how they were living? Such walks were always a blessing to the whole community. In one of those walks, and in the silence of midnight, he heard a woman complaining of her husband's absence away from her and chanting:

"O by God, had it not been for my fear of Allah, this bed would have been shaken to its foundations by some illicit act committed on it." At once `Omar went to his daughter Hafsa and asked her: "How long can a woman endure the pain of her husband's absence?" And Hafsa replied: "A month, two, three, till a maximum of four months."

Upon that, the very conscientious, equitable and merciful ruler sent for the woman's husband to come back home from the Holy War he had been joining. Moreover, a

command was given to all husbands taking part in any Holy War not to be away from their wives any longer than four months.

And how about the story of the milk woman-seller, and her argument with her God-fearing daughter? The mother wanted her daughter to adulterate the milk by mixing it with water. The daughter protested saying that it was immoral to do it. But then the mother said that nobody, not even `Omar himself, would see them while they were adulterating the milk, upon which the daughter shouted that if `Omar did not see them, `Omar's God, the Knower, the Cognizant and the Seer would do. `Omar was happy to hear that, and went straight away to his house where he called his sons to come before him. He asked for the one of them who had not been married yet, and told him that he had chosen his bride for him. The son welcomed the choice, and the bride was no other than the milk-woman's daughter. Years passed and this milk-woman's daughter, `Omar's daughter-in-law, gave birth to a baby: a little girl who grew up, and was married to `Abdulaziz-ibn-Marwan, to give him, and the whole world with him, the fifth orthodox caliph of Islam: `Omar-ibn-'Abdulaziz.

And how about the story of the hungry children whom `Omar heard crying with pain, because they could not find what to eat? Their old mother was sitting powerless, not knowing what to do, except to invoke God against `Omar, complaining of him to the Just. When he knew what they needed, he himself went and brought a sack of flour and a container of oil, carried them on his back and refused to let anybody else carry them for him saying "Nobody will carry off my sins for me on the Day of Judgment." He went to the old woman, helped her to prepare food for her children, and remained with them until the children ate and then went to bed. The old woman's gratitude was such that she said to `Omar, not knowing who he was: "In the morning, I will go to `Omar and tell him that if `Omar had forgotten us, Allah had not, but had rather sent you to help us and save the children." `Omar's response was nothing more than this: "When you go to `Omar, you will find me there."

And how about the story of `Omar and the horse? He once bought a horse, and after riding it for a while, in order to try it, he found that there was a defect in it. So he wanted to return it to its owner, thinking that the latter might have deceived him, but the man refused to take his horse back. Nothing did the Commander of the Faithful do, except to lodge his complaint with a judge against the horse-seller who decided to choose the judge himself, and he actually chose a man with the name of "Shuraih", a judge well-reputed to be very equitable. `Omar stood before the judge, who, having studied the case and listened to both men, gave his verdict addressing `Omar:

"Take away what you have bought or give it back as unimpaired and flawless as when you took it." What did `Omar do then? Did he give commands that the judge be kept in jail? Did he discharge him from his post? No. He was rather happy to hear the verdict, and, looking at the judge he said, "Jurisdiction is none but this." Then he awarded Shuraih for his justice by appointing him as the "Judge of Koufah", a post many reputable judges, then, aspired to take.

And how about the story of the Yamanite cloths? When those cloths came in quantities from Yaman, `Omar distributed them equally in public among the people. Some days later he was seen wrapped in a garb that matched with his size, which

meant that he had taken for himself more cloth than he had given everybody else. One day, with that long garb on,

`Omar went up the pulpit to address the people and urge them to join the Holy War. He started his address saying:
"O Brethren! Listen and obey."

But instead of being answered with warm shouts and loud applause, a strong voice was heard saying to him:
"No listening and no obedience."

And `Omar, very calmly, looked at the speaker, who chanced to be `Abdur-Rahman ibn-'Awf, a well-known companion of the Prophet's, and said:
"Why? May Allah have mercy on you!" `Abdur-Rahman ibn-'Awf, with a daring confidence, said:

"Supposedly you took the same length of the cloth as you gave each one of us. How, then, have you had that garb tailored to you when you are taller than anyone of us? You must have favoured ourself with more cloth."

In defence of himself, `Omar summoned his son `Abdullah to explain how all that had happened, and `Abdullah proceeded forward to declare that he had relinquished his share of the cloth to his father, to allow him to have a suitable garb tailored for him to meet the people in. Upon hearing that, `Abdur-Rahman ibn-'Awf, now being convinced and calmed down, said to `Omar.

"Now we listen and obey." And how about the story of the woman's dowry? In an address to the people, `Omar advised them not to exaggerate in paying the dowry. But in a very daring and astonishing argument, which is strange to the world of today, a woman raised her voice addressing the Commander of the Faithful:

"O`Omar! How have you forgotten Allah's Revelation:

{وَإِنْ أَرَدتُّمُ اسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَّكَانَ زَوْجٍ وَآتَيْتُمْ إِحْدَاهُنَّ قِنطَاراً فَلاَ تَأْخُذُواْ مِنْهُ شَيْئاً أَتَأْخُذُونَهُ بُهْتَاناً وَإِثْماً مُّبِيناً} النساء20

"And if you want to substitute a wife for another wife, and had given one a qintar (aboutkilo grams) (of gold), take back nothing of it. Would you take it by slander, and a manifest wrong?" (Al Nisaa:4:30)

`Omar kept silent for a while, and after deliberating the woman's logical argument, he said to himself and to the people, as though to let the whole world hear and man's history record:

"This is where a woman is right, and that is where `Omar has made a mistake. O 'Omar!

All the people know better than you do!"

And how about `Omar's private life at home? His household had to suffer a great deal in their attempts to keep in conformity with the master's commands and desires. `Omar's wife lived as any other wife did. She was not allowed to eat sweets. As almost every body else did, `Omar used to light at night a small torch in the light of which he considered the affairs of the State. But if anybody went to talk to him about private matters, having nothing to do with the State's affairs, he put out the light of the torch, as it was a special property of the State. Nobody had the right to use it in private matters.

Whenever he wanted to command the people to do or not to do something, `Omar always started with his household. He used to gather them and address them saying:

"Everybody has an eye upon you, as the bird of prey on the flesh. I swear that if any prohibition is done by any of you, he or she shall be doubly punished." Because of the little subsistence he allocated for himself from the Treasury, `Omar had to resort to trade for his and the household's livelihood. He used to borrow money, and very often did he find himself in difficulty, so much so that many times did he find himself unable to pay back his debts in time. Yet the debtors were not tolerant and always kept on asking and asking for the repayment of their debt! without any consideration of the man's post or circumstances. And when 'omar was in the throes of death, nothing could distract him from asking about his debts, or commanding his son `Abdullah to pay them back saying: "If the property of `Omar's family is sufficient for paying back the debts, that will do; otherwise, ask Banu-Adiy. If they fail to do it, ask Quraish, and do not go farther than that." But `Abdur-Rahman ibn-'Awf, who was present, suggested that those debts could be borrowed from the Treasury, and paid back to their owners, till they were brought back to the Treasury. `Omar first rejected that suggestion, but then he summoned his son `Abdullah, and said to him: "Will you guarantee that?" And `Abdullah said: "I will."

He fulfilled his promise to his father, and not later than a week after the burial of his father, `Abdullah carried the borrowed money and paid it back to `Uthman, the new Caliph, and brought the witnesses who had witnessed his pledge to his father before, to testify now that the money had been repaid to the Treasury. What happened was that a small house

belonging to `Omar was sold; and the price was used for the repayment of his debts. This is why that house remained for a long time after it had been sold, bearing the name of "The Repayment House".

IV

The Ramadab (Famine) Year: `Omar' s success in tackling all the problems of construction and organization was only parallelled by his success in dispelling all the griefs and worries befalling his subjects. He understood very well the Prophetic Tradition which said: "Everyone of you is a guardian and responsible for those in his charge; the Imam (leader) is a guardian and responsible for his subjects; the man, in his home, is a guardian and responsible for his household; the woman, concerning her husband's property, is a guardian and responsible for what she is entrusted with; the servant, in his master's house, is a guardian and responsible for his custody. So

everybody is a guardian and responsible for the charge entrusted to him." And the Commander of the Faithful took very much care to bear that responsibility to the utmost degree of perfection. The nature of his position as he understood it, and as all other rulers of today should, was that he considered himself the guardian of every being on the land of the whole Islamic State. "If a mule stumbled in Iraq, I will be responsible for that before Allah: Why I had not repaired the road for it." And here lies the secret of his greatness. Awe from Allah was always the light that showed him the right path. No wonder, then, that anything he said or did was but an inspiration accompanying the great genius of a man who was always conscious of the Presence of Allah: the Seer, the Cognizant and the Knower. And if `Omar had earned for himself the title of "The Great Architect of Islam" in matters dealing with the construction and organization of the State, as we shall see later, he can also be called "The most noble, equitable, and merciful guardian of all his subjects."

We have seen examples of how he was all the time living the problems, worries and troubles of his subjects, and how he always exerted himself to find solutions for such problems, and thus dispel his people's worries and relieve them of all their troubles. The whole question is a matter of mutual love between the ruler and the subjects that will inevitably lead to mutual confidence between them. It is not for nothing that Allah, in the Glorious Qur'an, gives His command:

{أَطِيعُواْ اللّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ الرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِي الأَمْرِ مِنكُمْ} النساء59

"Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and the rulers from you." (Al Nisaa:4:59)

This, beside other innumerable incidents in the reign of the Commander of the Faithful, might explain why `Omar's earnest zeal always pushed him to do what might raise him to the rank where he, as a ruler and guardian of the Muslim Community (Ummah), would come next to Allah and his Messenger in matters of obedience.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century of the Islamic era, the Arabs of Hidjaz, Tihama and Najd were grievously stricken by drought, which case lasted for over nine months during which no single drop of rain fell until the earth became ash-grey. This is why the period is called "The Ramadah Year" or "The Ash Year", indicating the dryness which inflicted the Arabs of those regions with a famine the like of which they had never suffered before.

During such a disaster, `Omar's personality manifested itself in a manner never to be found in any other ruler all through the world history, ancient and modern. That personality which combined firmness with brilliance, endurance with vigor of action, resignation to the Will of Allah with incessant communications with his vicegerents to send whatever help they could, was the most dynamic force that implemented the will of Allah to the benefit of the people. It was the gracious hand that was stretched out to drive away the disaster, and save the people from starvation. `Omar's time, thought and energy were almost confined, day and night, to the wiping out of the tears of the crying youngsters and to the relieving of the pains of the elders - all grievously suffering from the beginning of starvation. During the day, he used to tire himself out in considering the multitudinous affairs of the people. At night, and after saying the

last prayers in the mosque, he used to go home and pray as long as he could with his mind, heart and soul, all the time connected to the Heavens, in earnest request that the famine be extinguished. Then he had a little sleep after which he used to wake up quickly, go out, and walk about, here and there, till he reached the tents of the Bedoums who had come to stay around Madinah in quest of food and water.

The Commander of the Faithful used to walk about by almost every house during the last part of the night to check the people's conditions, doing that at times alone, and at other times accompanied by one of his subordinates In most cases, the two were seen going about with sacks of flour and oil, and `Omar distributed them among those who were in need, and perhaps helped them in making the food himself. When the drought was aggravated, and starvation drew nearer and nearer, `Omar did not hesitate to write to his vicegerents in Palestine, Iraq and Syria, commanding them to send food and clothes as early as they could. The first of those was `Amr-ibnul-'As, the Governor of Palestine. `Omar sent him this message:

"In the Name of Allah, Ar-Rahman, the Ever Merciful".
From the servant of Allah, `Omar, the Commander of the Faithful, to the disobedient Ibnul `As. Are you going to wait and see me and everybody here starving, when you and yours are living in affluence? Succour, Succour, Succour!"

`Amr's reply came to `Omar immediately, begging him not to worry, and assuring that a long caravan of camels loaded with food and clothes would very soon arrive in Madinah. This did really happen; other vicegerents did the same thing and sent whatever succour they could to `Omar in Madinah. Therefore, he sent men to receive the food and clothes the moment they arrived in Arabia, and then disperse everywhere in the desert to give whatever help the Bedoums needed. They slaughtered camels and distributed their meat, and gave the Bedoums flour, oil and clothes.

In Madinah, `Omar himself slaughtered camels everyday: those who were short of food went either to eat and satisfy their hunger, or take home what sufficed them and their households of meat and flour. Thousands of hungry people went everyday for either purpose. As for `Omar himself, he found pleasure in eating with the people. He never favoured himself or his household with anything more than he offered his subjects. Then there came a time when he deprived himself from eating meat, and after a while, added fat and milk as two other kinds of prohibited food. He enjoined upon himself only one kind of food to eat morning and evening: oil. And he kept being so harsh and stern upon himself until his face darkened, and emaciation was all that could be seen of him in place of the great stature and the ruddy face, signs of the good health `Omar enjoyed before "The Ash Year". The Caliph's household also had to undergo the same harshness and sternness he enjoined upon himself. He never allowed any of them to relish eating while the people around were hungry. He was filled with grief for what had been afllicting the people, and he underwent the pains of worry and concern about the people's affairs, so much so that his companions were filled with apprehension for his safety.

Amidst all those disastrous circumstances, the Commander of the Faithful used to perform long prayers in which he prayed Allah, in awe and fear, not to ordain the extinction of the Muslim Community (Muhammad's Ummah) to be at his hands. He one day went up the pulpit and addressed the people, reminding them that what they

had been afflicted with might be the result of Allah's discontent with him alone, or with all the Muslims excluding him, or with all of them together. But whether it was this or that or otherwise, they had to repent whatever sins they might have committed and ask for Allah's forgiveness. Then `Omar called them for the prayer for rain which they all performed behind him. A few days later, rain fell heavily. It seemed as though Allah had responded to `Omar's prayers. That was what `Omar had been taught by his friend and master, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, i.e. to perform the prayer for rain whenever there was drought, and ask for Allah's forgiveness thenceforth. That is the guidance of the revelation of Allah in the Glorious Qur'an:

{فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّاراً } {يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاء عَلَيْكُم مِّدْرَاراً } نوح 10 –11

"So I said: `Ask forgiveness from your Lord; for certainly He is Ever-Forgiving. He will send rain to you in abundance." (Nuh:71:11-10)

During "The Ash Year" `Omar suspended the collection of the poor-due; but the year after, when conditions became better, he sent the tax-collectors every where to levy the alms, in double value, then divide half of it among the badly-off people of the tribes, and bring to him the other half, to go to the Treasury. May Allah be pleased with you, O`Omar, the most honest and God-fearing guardian of Islam and the Muslims.

Omar's Martyrdom

The enemies of Islam would not leave a man like `Omar to carry on his wonderful achievements in the service of Islam and the Muslims. And the venomous Rancours that were still existent in the hearts of the Persian and Byzantine slaves would never make them forget that it was `Omar who had caused them to lead that life of servility.

`Omar was one day walking in Madinah when a Persian youth, named "Fairouz" and surnamed "`Abu-Lu'lu'ah", met him. That youth was a slave under "Al-Mugheerah-ibn-Shu'bah", and had been taken captive after the conquest of Nahawand. To the Commander of the Faithful, he complained of his master saying that he had imposed upon him four dirhams to be paid every day. `Omar asked him about his job, and the answer was that he worked as a carpenter, a blacksmith and a house painter. Then `Omar remarked that the tax his master had imposed upon him was quite fair, but the youth was not happy with that remark, and went away full of indignation. This story is nothing more than a spurious pretext which might have been plotted to kill the Commander of the Faithful.

`Omar met that youth again while he was in the company of some friends of his. He called him and said: "I have been informed that you claim to be able to make a mill that grinds by the power of the wind." The youth asserted that he was. So `Omar said to him: "Then make us one," to which the youth answered: "I will certainly make you a mill that will be the chit-chat of all the people in the cities." When the youth went away, `Omar said to those with him: "The slave has threatened me already."

`Omar could not do anything against that abominable Magian because, according to the Islamic law, a man can never be convicted on the basis of suspicion or uncertainty. So one day, one of the blackest days in the history of mankind, at dawn in the mosque, when `Omar started to lead the Muslims in prayer saying: "Greater is Allah" (Allahu Akbar), that devil, "`Abu-Lu'lu'ah," came unnoticed out of his hiding place in a dark corner of the mosque, as a venomous serpent coming out of its dark pit, without being noticed. He went straight towards `Omar, and, with a dagger in his hand, aimed three deadly stabs at the pure body in the back, at which the Commander of the Faithful fell down on the ground with a heavy effusion of blood. Above all things, what concerned him was the continuation of the prayer. He took the hand of `Abdur-Rahman-ibn-'Awf and sent him ahead to lead the prayer. Then he said: "Catch that dog; he has killed me," as though he knew it was that Magian dog who had committed the hideous crime.

`Omar was afterwards carried to his home. He was out of his senses. One of the people around said: "Wake him up so that he may say his prayer." The call to prayer brought him back to his senses; he said: "Oh yes! the prayer! No fortune in Islam for him who abandons his prayer!" Then he demanded to be helped to perform ablution, after which he said his prayer. When he was assured that his murderer was "`Abu-Lu'lu'ah," he said: "Praise be to Allah Who has not ordained my murder to be committed by a man who can argue with me before Allah on the plea that he has once prostrated to Him."

When the last hour approached, and there was no single hope of recovery, `Omar commanded his son `Abdullah to go to `Aa'ishah, the Mother of the Faithful, and ask

her permission to have him buried beside his favourite brothers: the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, and Abu-Bakr, Allah be pleased with him. She gave him that permission.

The martyrdom of `Omar-ibnul-Khattab, as we have said at the beginning of this chapter, came to answer for the venomous rancours that filled the hearts of the Persian and Byzantine slaves. It is always related that `Abu-Lu'lu'ah" used to stroke with his hand the heads of any Persian captives whenever he met them, and say: "These Arabs have devoured my liver. This statement shows the bitter hatred that Magian dog bore against Islam and the Muslims. No wonder, then, that he frequented the dwelling-places of "Al-Hormozan" the ex-governor of "Al-Ahwaz" who was conquered by the Muslims, and "Jufainah Al-' Anbari", so that the three of them might take revenge from the Commander of the Faithful under the banner of whose religion, and within the scope of whose justice, they were living in safety.

It has been related that the Prophet, Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, one day seeing `Omar with a shirt on, asked him: "Is your shirt a new one or has it been previously worn?" When `Omar said, "It has been previously worn, o Messenger of Allah," the Prophet said, "Wear the new, live benignly and die a martyr. And may Allah offer you happiness in this world and in the Hereafter."

And `Omar died a martyr reciting these words from the Glorious Qur'an:

{وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَراً مَّقْدُوراً} الأحزاب38

"And the Command of Allah is a decree determined." (Al Ahzab:33:38)